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December 17, 2020

Dr. Jon Hare  
Science and Research Director  
Northeast Fisheries Science Center  
166 Water Street  
Woods Hole, MA 02543

Dear Dr. Hare,

I am writing to provide you with a copy of the final version of the Groundfish Trawl Task Force (GTTF) White Paper (enclosed). As the Science Center continues its efforts to improve its calculation and management of groundfish stocks in the Northeast Fishery, I respectfully request your consideration of the recommendations to enhance scientific assessments outlined in this report.

In 2015, I launched the GTTF in order to encourage collaboration between the fishing industry, the scientific community, and NOAA. I believed the partnership would be useful in addressing concerns I had heard from groundfishermen in my district. As you know, for many years, groundfishermen have noted major differences between stock assessments and their daily observations on the water. The GTTF was charged with researching this long-standing disparity and addressing the scientific tools used in the groundfish stock assessment process.

In the course of their work, the GTTF analyzed the statistical strengths and weaknesses of bottom trawl surveys. Their White Paper provides an overview of that analysis and proposes notable recommendations to supplement existing methodologies used to estimate groundfish biomass.

I appreciate the conversations you have had to date with the GTTF about their work. In submitting the final version of the White Paper for your review, I encourage the Science Center to consider implementing the following recommendations:

- Priority 1: using additional data sources to enhance estimates of population size, age-structure, selectivity, and efficiency, such as using industry-based surveys, open-codend video surveys and fishery dependent data
- Priority 2: splitting the time series so that the Bigelow survey series is treated as a separate index for all stock assessments to remove the uncertainty in survey calibrations
- Priority 3: using the ongoing longline surveys in the Gulf of Maine in the next management track assessments
- Priority 4: combining the current stratified-random survey with more targeted stations aimed at sampling key species that are under-sampled by the current surveys
- Priority 5: evaluating the influence of changing environmental conditions on survey catches

I understand that the upcoming 2021 Fall Assessments, and the joint Northeast Region Coordinating Council (NRCC) and Assessment Oversight Panel (AOP) meetings that precede them, provide an ideal opportunity to incorporate necessary changes in the upcoming assessments. I look forward to NOAA's review of these priorities.

Efforts to rebuild and sustain healthy fisheries in New England require the full array of tools available to scientists and managers. In order to both promote science-based stewardship of our marine resources and preserve New England's local, independent fishing fleet—whose captains and crews have a vested interest in maintaining a healthy biomass in the North Atlantic—I encourage NOAA to consider utilizing the additional data sources cited by the GTTF White Paper.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact my Regional Director, Kelly Bovio, at 978-531-1669 or [kelly.bovio@mail.house.gov](mailto:kelly.bovio@mail.house.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Seth Moulton", written in a cursive style.

Seth Moulton

Member of Congress

Cc: Michael Pentony, Regional Administrator, NOAA Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office